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Are You Safer Today?

How Well Have We Used the Thousand Days Since 9/11?

An Address before the

Center for American Progress
by
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It will soon be a thousand days since al Qaeda launched its first successful attack

within U.S. borders. Since that time many changes have taken place inside our country and in the way we deal with other nations around the world. Most of those changes have been justified as steps that were necessary to insure that nothing like September 11th ever happens again. But how much progress have we really made? How far have we come in reducing the likelihood that it will happen again?

One thousand days has often been viewed as a period of time for communities and even whole nations to stop and take stock. What have we done right? What have we done wrong? What are our largest remaining areas of vulnerability? What are our prospects of getting hit again?

I think our efforts to prevent future terrorist attacks can be divided into three stages. The first step was to hit al Qaeda and hit them hard. Take the battle to them. Destroy their leadership; their ability to communicate; their ability to raise and transfer funds; their ability to obtain weapons and to move members between countries and most importantly, their capacity to organize attacks against the United States.

The second step was to understand the factors in the Arab and Muslim worlds that feed this kind of senseless anger and why that anger has been directed toward the United States. Why did so many ordinary people in the Muslim world cheer on September 11th and what does it take to reduce or at least redirect the anger that is now so focused on us?

Thirdly, what are we doing to upgrade our defenses here at home? What goals have we set? Do they make sense? How well have we performed in reaching those goals?

With respect to the first goal, I think the United States has for the most part performed well particularly if we look at the early stages of our effort and if we view al Qaeda as an organization, rather than an idea or a cause. The organization's leadership has been significantly diminished. While a number of its most senior leaders have survived, the best evidence indicates that they have grave difficulty communicating with others in the organization or playing any kind of day-to-day leadership role. Significant numbers of lesser figures in the organization are still at large and they are very dangerous. But they face much greater challenges moving about the world, receiving the training necessary to successfully execute large scale attacks and getting the materials and support necessary to launch such attacks.

The initial phases of our attack against al Qaeda were highly successful. The planning and execution of the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan was a high-water mark in our efforts against terrorism. The initial cooperation that we received in the wake of September 11th – from our traditional allies in Europe and also from nations across the globe that have at times been less than friendly to U.S. interests was also impressive.

But somehow, we lost our focus. Having destroyed the Taliban's capability to rule Afghanistan we did not move aggressively to insure that the government that we support in its stead could fill the void. We did not invest anything like the level of resources for Afghanistan that was needed to make rapid, noticeable changes in the quality of life. Because of that, in a large portion of the country, we did not have the leverage to strengthen the hand of central government, extend the rule of law, and deny terrorists safe haven. We also did not sufficiently exert our influence to insure that the Afghan army that we were attempting to build was representative enough of the various ethnic and tribal groups across the country to become a credible force for stability and unification.

But the attack on al Qaeda began to loose steam outside of Afghanistan as well. Talented intelligence operatives with highly specialized knowledge of Arab culture, language, and political behavior were diverted from the listening posts and operations centers across the Arab world where al Qaeda activity was most likely to surface to undertake a quite different mission. Financial resources, talented administrators and trainers who might have helped our allies in the Arab world improve their own military and intelligence capabilities against indigenous terrorist organizations were also diverted. The striking momentum that characterized the early phases of our efforts against al Qaeda has greatly dissipated. The organization has lost much of its backbone, but many of its pieces are still out there attempting to reorganize and regenerate the segments that have been lost. We no longer have the focus to our effort to insure that that does not happen.

Still, you would have to say that our efforts against al Qaeda have been a success – at least if al Qaeda is viewed simply as an organization. The problem is that al Qaeda is as much an idea as it is an organization and ideas are hard to kill. Bullets can kill organizations – they sometimes only strengthen ideas.

As General Anthony Zinni said recently in a lecture before the Center for Strategic and International Studies, while we may be winning the war on terrorism on a tactical level, on the strategic level we don't appear to even have a plan.

Osama bin Laden never intended al Qaeda to be the command structure for the jihad against the United States. The term "al Qaeda" means simply, "the base." Bin Laden wanted to create a network to support and encourage jihad. He wanted to attack and overthrow the Arab

governments around the world that he viewed as corrupt and out of sync with his views on the teachings of the Koran and he wanted to attack the foreign power that stood behind most of those governments — the United States. Bin Laden's challenge was to create a blueprint that could be used for such attacks and to inspire large numbers of disgruntled members of the Arab and Muslim world to follow that blueprint.

He wanted to create a movement that represented more than a small army of terrorists — a movement that could bring down moderate Arab governments and, with the overwhelming support of Arab peoples, drive the United States from theMiddle East.

While bin Laden has suffered huge organizational setbacks over the past thousand days, he has been enormously successful in progress made toward his one strategic objective. He has captured the attention of the Arab world and much of the Muslim world. To a remarkable degree he has even won their sympathies, and in some instances, their commitment. If we wish to reverse that, we must begin to think strategically as well as tactically. We must succeed in our efforts to take the second step, to reshape the image of the United States in the Arab and Muslim worlds. We must not only strengthen the determination of our friends in the region to resist terrorism but also encourage them to address the underlying problems that feed it. Even for many of the brightest and most industrious young people in many Arab countries, hope is in short supply. While the energy resources of the region have brought great wealth to a few, a chance has largely been missed for many governments to use those resources to build opportunity economies.

How we change our image in the Arab world and what policies we should pursue to accomplish it is an issue that will spark debate and some division in this country. That debate needs to begin and it is the responsibility of leaders in both the executive and legislative branches to begin it.

Given how poorly we have done over the past thousand days in stemming the anti-American passions in the Middle East, it is even more important that we do a good job in the third step required for a successful strategy: upgrading our defenses here at home.

In evaluating our performance on that front, it is important that we distinguish motion from movement. I am afraid that in many respects we have had more activity than we have had progress.

On September 11th, we had more than 130 agencies and activities of the federal government engaged in some aspect of homeland security. Those pieces of the bureaucracy were spread across most of the Departments of the federal government. There was no central capacity to oversee or monitor how well they worked together. Many of these agencies had only a fraction of the resources necessary to accomplish the security tasks that experts in the field believed could prevent future attacks.

So, after a thousand days, what has changed?

Well, we are certainly spending more money. The government is spending about $5 billion a

year more just on airport baggage and passenger screening. We have expanded the size of the customs service and the immigration service. We have bought new equipment in our ports to screen cargo coming into the United States from international shipping and we have had a significant growth in law enforcement activities. But if you compare the challenge we face with the resources we are using to meet those challenges, it is clear we are trying to do this on the cheap. We are like someone with a good paying job who must get to work on time every day in order to keep that job. But instead of buying the most reliable car he can find, he gets a fifteen year old model — one that will get him there most of the time but will eventually cost him his good paying job.

Failure in establishing our defenses against terrorism places lives at risk. It also puts at risk our capacity as a society to generate wealth. Although the greatest loss would most certainly be measured in human life, penny pinching on necessary security is foolhardy from a simple economic perspective.

OMB has prepared an analysis of homeland security spending which is seriously flawed. Programs that were not counted as homeland security a few years ago have now suddenly been shifted into the homeland security category in order to convey the impression of a greater increase in effort than has actually taken place. Nonetheless, the OMB exercise is instructive for getting a big picture sense of what we are doing to address critical security issues. In total, OMB argues that we have gone from spending $20 billion a year — or about two-tenths of one percent of GDP in fiscal 2000 — to $46 billion a year, or less then four-tenths of one percent today. That means that even based on OMB accounting, our increase in homeland security spending has been less than two-tenths of one percent. To provide some perspective on that number, the share of GDP paid in federal taxes has dropped from 20.8 percent to 16.4 percent during that same period — a decline of 4.4 percent or twenty-two times the size of the increase in spending to protect against terrorism.

Another perspective on the level of effort we have made thus far is the oft-used analogy of Pearl Harbor. Pearl Harbor led us to the creation of the concept of Gross Domestic Product. The Roosevelt Administration believed that it might require 50 percent of our total output to take on the Germans and the Japanese simultaneously. They asked the Commerce Department to develop a method of measuring national output. They not only produced the concept that is now used around the world to measure economic activity, but they were also actually able to reach that goal of spending nearly half of the nation's output on the war effort.

We do not need to put 50 percent of our output into this war or even 5 percent. Whether you think that our war effort in Iraq is associated with the war on terror or is a separate and competing activity, expenditures related to that activity account for more than 1 percent of GDP — more than twice as much as we are spending on activities directly related to protecting the homeland. Given that fact, it is blatantly ridiculous to pretend that we cannot afford what we need to protect against terrorist attacks.

Another major attack could erase a trillion or two trillion dollars from the total valuation of the New York Stock Exchange. It could substantially slow the pace of economic growth for a year or more. Again, the most important consequence of a terrorist attack is the loss of human life, but penny pinching on homeland security makes no sense. Even if we consider only the economics of the issue, the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security found that the cost of the 9/11 attack was nearly 2 trillion dollars, including the loss in stock market wealth, lower corporate profits and higher discount rates for economic volatility.

Now it should be noted that the Administration's fiscal year 2005 budget attempts to make a case that in future years we can reduce the size of federal deficits from the current record levels and still afford additional tax cuts. In making that case their projections for future year spending levels in various categories of the budget are revealing. Homeland Security spending is essentially locked into place at current levels. In fact, what OMB is telling us is that unless the

American people or the Congress force a change in priorities, what we have now for securing the nation is all that we are going to get and could decline by as much as $900 million.

But the question we should be asking is: Are we really doing enough? Are there things that we really ought to be doing that the resource levels we have allocated to the problem prevent us from doing?

One lesson from September 11th that virtually no one could miss is the need to secure our airlines and our airways. We have spent considerably more on this objective than on any area of homeland security. But there are a surprising number of resource issues still unaddressed with respect to protecting our airways.

For example, we still do not have an effective system of explosive detection. Put more directly, it is still much too easy to get explosive materials onto passenger airlines.

The Transportation Security Administration has identified equipment that could have provided us with that capability. It's expensive, (it would have cost close to $3 billion to install the equipment nationwide) but it would have dramatically improved our capacity to detect explosive materials. It also would have significantly reduced the number of screeners required in airports around the country. In fact, the savings in TSA personnel costs from the use of this equipment was estimated to be large enough to offset the entire cost of the equipment.

The Transportation Security Administration proposed to OMB that the agency purchase much of the needed equipment when it was preparing its plans to meet the 2002 explosive detection requirement set in law. But OMB decided that the expense could not be accommodated within the tight, arbitrary limits for homeland security spending which the President and the Director of OMB had decided to impose. Republicans in Congress then adopted a budget resolution that did not provide the Appropriations Committee with the latitude to move forward with the purchase. As a result we do not have an effective system of detecting explosive materials and that failure is due entirely to artificial constraints on resources and incompetent budgeting. TSA has recently acknowledged that the more expensive machines would pay for themselves within 3 to 5 years.

Following September 11th there was broad recognition of the fact that we needed to restart the sky marshals program and insure that there were enough marshals on domestic and international passenger flights so that potential highjackers would always have to think twice about the likelihood that a sky marshal might be present on a targeted flight.

Now the exact number of marshals that the President and the Congress agreed were necessary has remained classified. But few people realize that we are no longer operating at that level. No one has come forward with convincing arguments that the level was too high or that adequate safety can be assured at a lower level. We have simply once again allowed arbitrary budget limits, applied to one small portion of the budget, to drive a decision that may unnecessarily put a great many Americans at risk. Under the President’s budget submission for fiscal 2005, we will have 20 percent fewer sky marshals than the President and the Congress agreed that we needed just two years ago. That is in spite of the fact that there has been a significant increase during that period in the number of domestic and international flights and in the number of passenger miles flown.

We have had — and continue to have — serious communications problems between military pilots who have the ultimate responsibility to insure that commercial aircraft are not used to crash into buildings (and the commercial aircraft and the FAA system that controls them). Quite simply, military and commercial flight systems cannot easily and quickly talk to one another and the potential that leaves for miscalculation and mistakes is horrific.

Despite the fact that this problem could be solved for relatively little money, the military felt the commercial system should foot the problem and the FAA and the airlines felt it should be addressed in the military budget. OMB decided the cheapest solution was to not to decide.

Finally, last fall, I decided for them. The $10 million that was needed was earmarked in the Defense Appropriation bill. I suppose that's a good ending to the story, except that the delay in funding means that the system will not be operative until 2006. That gives you one more thing to think about when you board a plane. It also provides more than a little insight into how decisions about homeland security are being sorted out within the executive branch.

These examples of inaction with respect to airway security are serious, but they do not begin to compare with the nearly total abdication our responsibility to assure the safety of rail transportation. As the recent attacks in Spain have demonstrated, our enemy is not wedded to attacks on any single transportation mode. He will watch and wait until he finds a vulnerability that can be exploited.

Rail is vulnerable in two ways. One is from attacks against our freight rail system that handles a huge portion of the materials, products and chemicals that allow our economy to function. The second is from attacks (like those in Spain) against the roughly 13 million Americans who use passenger rail systems each day.

Luckily, the Department of Transportation and other agencies in the executive branch began a process of sharing classified threat information with the nation's rail freight carriers in the late 1990s. The plans developed as a result of that process are in place and provide a foundation for significant security upgrades. But the plans are dependent upon the federal government meeting certain obligations it accepted during the planning process. Under those plans federal security forces are specifically required to monitor tracks and facilities. Not only have we failed to do that but we have not even designated the agency or department that will supply the forces or establish a means of training them.

As disquieting as the lack of progress in securing our heavy freight and passenger rail systems may be, the security efforts on behalf of transit systems is even worse.

The White House has failed to mediate the dispute between the Departments of Homeland Security and Transportation over who is actually in charge of transit security. A General Accounting Agency report recommending a resolution of the issue has been rejected by both departments. The impasse continues despite the fact that it is halting any significant progress in securing the systems and despite the fact that transit systems have been the most frequent worldwide targets of terrorist attacks.

Neither Department is willing to spend even a small fraction of the security related costs most experts feel is necessary. Department of Transportation security funding for transit systems totals $37 million in the current year and the Department of Homeland Security has allocated only $115 million over the past two years. In contrast, the transit industry estimates that $6 billion is needed for security training, radio communications systems, security cameras, and limiting access to sensitive facilities.

What is the Department of Homeland Security's answer to these unmet needs?

They testified this spring that more funds are not necessary until they have had a better opportunity to define the problem. Now, that is an orderly approach, which we should applaud as long as the Department can guarantee al Qaeda's cooperation with their schedule. My concern is that the Department is likely to get some help they have not asked for in developing a definition of the transit security problem.

The Department has clearly become aware of how vulnerable they are to criticism about their lack of serious attention to transit issues. Only two weeks ago, in a classic move to cover their bureaucratic backsides, they issued a directive to transit systems ordering them to take a series of actions that the Department's own data collection system indicates have already been completed by the vast majority of transit authorities across the country.

Since September 11th the vulnerability that has most troubled many experts has been maritime

cargo and the exposure of our ports to a nuclear, chemical, or biological attack from a weapon placed in a shipping container. As the president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Tom Donohue, has pointed out, such an event could cause death and destruction on a scale far beyond the attacks launched on September 11th. It could virtually shut down our global trading system for an extended period of time. The economic consequences would be almost incalculable. Terms like “economic downturn” or “recession” would not begin to describe the aftermath.

The Bush Administration has spent billions looking for new technologies with the capacity to knock a nuclear warhead out of the sky if it were launched in the nose cone of an intercontinental ballistic missile. It has invested heavily in the development of other technologies that are intended to serve that purpose but probably cannot. But they seem unresponsive to the fact that a rogue state or a terrorist organization can simply place such a weapon in a shipping container and explode it upon arrival in New York Harbor or in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New Orleans, or Boston. A ship can bring into this country a far less complicated weapon than one which could be placed on an ICBM. It can be massive in size and it does not need to even be thermonuclear in order to cause massive numbers of casualties, destruction and economic chaos.

So what have we done to protect ourselves? Protecting our ports is not unlike protecting our airports. We need to have multiple security perimeters. The first should be overseas. That requires a whole new approach to cargo inspection. It requires that our inspectors leave the United States, establish cooperative relationships with port security officials in countries around the world that ship to the United States. It requires that they establish a system of certification and best practices with major exporters around the world.

This is not a Democratic proposal. This is roughly the proposal that George Bush’s own appointed head of the Customs Service, Bob Bonner, took to the White House in months

immediately following September 11th. It is the proposal that the Council on Foreign Relations Task Force, headed by former Senators Rudman and Hart had endorsed. It is the proposal that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has written editorials to support.

But the White House waited until last year to request the first dime for this effort. What ever presence the United States has had in foreign ports over the past one thousand days has been entirely as a result of Congressional increases to homeland security spending — increases that were opposed by the White House, increases that the White House threatened at various stages in the legislative process to veto, and increases which on one occasion the White House did veto.

Last year, the White House reversed themselves and finally requested a portion of the funds that were needed for container security. Their position changed from, “we can’t afford it” to “we needed to wait.” That is a turnaround and I suppose we should welcome it. But the $126 million that the President has proposed for fiscal year 2005 will not adequately fund the program. It will not even allow us to fully staff the 45 foreign ports where DHS had planned to inspect all manifest documents. It will not permit our current foreign inspection programs to become permanent. We are currently in only 17 ports. We currently have no container security presence in China, the biggest U.S. trading partner in terms of cargo containers. The number of cargo containers arriving to the U.S. from China is more than three times those arriving from Hong Kong.

More troubling than the mere question of resources is the lack of political or bureaucratic clout behind this critical initiative. If having inspection agents working with foreign customs officials is to be a truly effective means of understanding what is in foreign ships before they leave for U.S. ports, it requires developing long term relationships between our agents and those who control the foreign ports we wish to monitor.

This involves a new level of training and expertise for our customs agents. It involves establishing continuity in the relationship we have with host governments in terms of what we expect to get and what incentives we can provide to those who cooperate. Nothing could be more destructive to this effort than to rotate in and out of foreign ports agents with only a few months of experience based on a deliberate system of staffing through temporary assignment. But that is precisely what we have done. In the few foreign ports where we do have a presence, that presence is a U.S. customs officer detailed there on a six-month temporary duty assignment. Those agents don't even know what the problems were between the U.S. and the host government when the program was initiated. They are certainly not people that officials of the host government would want to invest much time in getting to know — they will be gone before there is any pay off from developing a relationship.

If the overseas effort to identify the contents of cargo containers is the outer perimeter for protecting our ports, the ability of the Coast Guard to interdict, board and inspect U.S. bound shipping at sea is the next perimeter. Yet the Coast Guard's capacity to perform that function has also been restrained by lack of resources. The Administration frequently states that the Coast Guard is now boarding all vessels that are deemed to be "high interest." That means 80 percent of all other vessels are not boarded.

Observing, tracking, and controlling ships as they approach and enter into American waters is the next perimeter in securing our ports. Systems have been developed that are very similar to the systems by which air traffic control directs airplanes entering into U.S. airspace and approaching U.S. airports. These systems, however, are available in only nine ports, leaving 45 major ports without such a system. Again, this is penny wise and pound foolish. It is also a bad decision in terms of long-term cost effectiveness. More automated systems permit more rapid detection of ships that are not following control directives; they can be operated by fewer people and are long-term cost savers.

And, inside our ports, there are numerous critical issues. One is preventing unauthorized persons from having access to ships, containers, or port storage areas. A second is protecting hazardous chemicals and materials from attack. The Coast Guard estimated that the 185 commercial seaports in the United States would need about $7 billion to assess vulnerabilities and take necessary action to correct those vulnerabilities. These port authorities do not, in most instances, have the revenue raising authority to pay any significant portion of these costs. This year was the first time the Administration requested any money whatsoever for this purpose, and it only requested $46 million. The Congress has been able to appropriate only $587 million or less than 10 percent of the money needed to do the job.

Another major priority has been securing our land borders — in particular, the 3000 mile U.S. border with Canada or 5000 miles if we include Alaska. Despite our continuing strong economic and political ties to Canada, the situation of the two nations with respect to potential terrorist attacks is quite different. Canada's smaller role in world affairs and the image of Canada in the eyes of the international community make it a much less likely target of attack than the U.S. At the same time, Canada's vast geography and relatively small population have led to far more lenient immigration policies than those in place in the United States.

As a result there will continue to be significant differences between the two countries on how external security concerns are managed. That means that the question of how to control our border and the movement of people and cargo across that border is suddenly a matter of much greater concern.

Recognizing that concern, the Congress included language in the Patriot Act calling for the

tripling of the number of border agents and inspectors on the Canadian border above the levels we maintained on September 11th. As of October 2003, we were still more than 2000 people short of this goal. In addition, there was a clear need for significant additional equipment on the Canadian border to insure that those new people would be efficiently put to work: equipment like air stations, radiation monitors, and surveillance equipment.

To date we have fewer than 4000 agents and inspectors on the border. In other words, about one third of the positions promised in the Patriot Act are still unfilled. The fiscal year 2005 budget promises no increases from current levels. And the President's out-year budget projection provides a strong indication that personnel strength at the border will actually decline rather than increase over the next five years. With respect to equipment, we have provided the first air station (again one not requested by the Administration) and some radiation monitors, but have made no critical investments in things such as surveillance equipment.

The events of September 11th made clear that the brave men and women serving in the police, fire and emergency medical units in New York, New Jersey,Virginia, District of Columbia, and Maryland needed a significant amount of additional equipment and training to more effectively respond to the types of attacks that occurred on that day. It was also apparent that first responder units across the nation did not have most of the equipment they would need to deal with a nuclear, chemical, or biological attack.

The needs of local first responders were spelled out in considerable detail in the Rudman-Hart reports. But the federal government has already allowed most of the burden to fall on local governments. Since the capacity of those local governments to support such investments in the tough economic times is limited, progress in equipping first responders has been minimal.

Of the $98 billion in first responder needs identified by the Rudman-Hart report, the Feds have provided less than $14.5 billion, or 15 percent. As a result only 13 percent of fire departments can effectively respond to a hazmat incident. An estimated 57,000 firefighter's lack the personal protective clothing needed in a chem-bio attack. An estimated 1/3 of firefighters per shift are not equipped with self-contained breathing apparatus and nearly half of the available units are 10 years old. Only half of all emergency responders on shift have portable radios. And we still have massive needs for interoperable communications equipment. On site emergency personnel working for different agencies need to be able to talk to each other. We will probably never know how many victims in the World Trade Centers could have been saved if they had known that they needed to evacuate the buildings. We know that was a communication problem of disastrous proportions.

These are only a few examples of where corners have been cut in establishing the line of defense here at home.

But there is more to the story than simply talking about resources. In many instances, we have not had the leadership necessary to organize available resources in effective ways.

Prior to the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, the White House identified 133 separate agencies and activities within the federal government that played a role with respect to homeland security. The creation of a Department was the Administration's answer as to how to better manage and coordinate those disparate activities. The problem, however, is that only 22 of those 133 activities became part of the new department. A total of 111 agencies and activities, including the FBI, the CIA, the Defense Department, and many other key components

of the overall effort remained on the outside.

But for whatever reason, the effort to have centralized control and coordination of all of those activities within the White House was diminished. WhenTom Ridge went to DHS his replacement within the White House was not given the same clout to knock heads together and insure that Departments and agencies are working together toward a common mission. Too frequently, we have had 112 units of government headed off on their own with no central coordination, as Attorney General Ashcroft's press conference and the reaction within the administration to that press conference last week so clearly demonstrated.

And even within the new department there have been serious problems. In its first year of operation, DHS has disappointed even those with low expectations. Bureaucratic snarls have been so intense that on its first anniversary the Department still did not have a working phone directory. My staff has been asking for one for more than six months and has yet to receive it. It has also been reported that when callers phone the Department's hotline number, it just rings and rings. Members of Congress from the President's own party have expressed grave concerns about the inability of the Department to respond to requests for information in any kind of a reasonable time frame.

One possible cause of the rampant chaos at the department has been the injection of a huge number of political appointees. Since the creation of the Department more than one quarter of all personnel who have been hired for departmental operations have been political appointees. These individuals often appear more fixated on positioning themselves politically than on the nuts and bolts security problems, which the Department must address. We have seen a huge number of press releases promoting the Departments efforts, but we have few concrete efforts worthy of such self-promotion. We, for instance, still do not have regulations regarding the licensing and registration of hazardous material truckers nor do we have the detailed guidance for flight and cabin crew training to prepare for potential threat conditions which was mandated

by the Aviation and Transportation Security Act more than two years ago.

Typically, political appointees remain in their appointed positions for less than 24 months. At that point, they are off to some other part of the administration or headed back into the private sector. That means building true long-term competency within any Department is heavily dependent on recruiting a committed professional career staff. But the 114 political appointees now swarming the halls at DHS have — if anything — impeded that process. Of the 500 career positions needed to run the department, 171 remain vacant. One of the most critical positions in any Department is that of Budget Director. In only 14 months DHS has had three budget directors.

About a year and a half ago I spoke to a group of reporters at the National Press Club about where the country stood at that time in protecting itself against terrorist attacks. I feel that the coverage of that event was fair and I think we exposed some problems that, as a result of that coverage, have been fixed. But I also think that the press and the public have a presumption that this is such a complex issue that we simply have to trust the President and his advisors in the Executive Branch to do what is right. I think many of my colleagues in Congress have felt the same way. While I understand people's tendency to leave this complex calculus to the "experts," I think this town is currently awash in new information about the decision making process within this Administration which indicates that is a bad idea!

First of all, that is not the approach to decision making that the Constitution requires of us. It is our job to second-guess. When so much is at stake, the Congress, the press and the public have the clearest possible obligation to insure that the decision making within the Executive Branch is measured, deliberate, based on the best available information, and consistent with the quality of judgment befitting the seriousness of the risks to which we are exposed. Had that happened in the wake of 9/11 or even a year and a half ago there are many points in this statement that I might have been able to leave out.

One problem in all of this, frankly, is that it was hard for the press and the public to believe much of what I reported a year and a half ago. While the facts presented in that statement were well documented they presented a picture of executive branch decision-making that was wholly inconsistent with what the nation or the press corps wanted to believe. It was hard to accept the idea that in this moment of great national crisis we did not have systematic methods of screening information, examining policy choices, debating the pluses and minuses of each alternative, and making strategic choices based on an exhaustive effort to find the best possible alternative. But in recent months we have learned time and time again that this was not the nature of decision-making within this Administration.

Ron Suskind, using the exhaustive notes and papers of Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, tells of an extraordinary decision making process in which information is collected on the basis of decisions that preceded them. Richard Clarke describes a process both before and after 9/11 that was quite similar. So does Bob Woodward.

My own experience with the President himself, demonstrates that this President has listened as infrequently to those in the Congress who know something about homeland security as he did to our allies or the career American military before rushing into Iraq.

But any one who has been listening these last few months is pretty well aware of the fact that we were not vigilant and we're not picking up on clear information of elevated threat levels prior to 9/11. We did not respond in the summer of 2001 to that threat in the same manner that we responded 18 months earlier when similar threat information triggered a massive response to the millennium threat. We not have an orderly or honest process to measure the pluses and

minuses of invading Iraq. People at the highest levels silenced, dissent and criticism and irreversible actions were taken based on flawed information. We based our plans for security and reconstruction of Iraq on intelligence from a single organization outside of this government which both the State Department and the CIA said was unreliable. Unfortunately, that is all spilt milk. Even if we understand those mistakes, we can't go back and try it again.

What I am talking about today is not spilt milk. We can correct these policy mistakes and we can possibly correct them in a time frame that will prevent the next attack. It all depends on whether we are ready to get real.

Now, I am not optimistic by nature. Perhaps it is merely my nature that leads me to believe that the cauldron that is today boiling in Southwest Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East will likely spill over once more onto the shores of North America. If we are not ready, I do not want to look myself in the mirror for the rest of my life and wonder why I didn't ask tougher questions or insist on more responsible and responsive policies. I think the overall performance of our government to date in the area of homeland security merits a greater sense of skepticism and urgency on the part of the press and the general public as well.

We lived in a more dangerous world prior to September 11th than most Americans realized. Our efforts to making the world safer have met with mixed results and the numbers of persons who wish us harm and will go to great lengths to inflict harm have grown steadily during the past thousand days. Clearly some of our efforts have done little more than fed the flames of discontent and hatred.

That places even greater pressure on our last lines of defense, protecting our borders, our transportation systems and our capacity to respond to terrorist acts in this country if, God forbid, they are again committed. But as the facts I have today outlined well document, those efforts remain under funded and poorly managed. The President proposed that we have 20 percent fewer sky marshals than we had a little more than a year ago. We have hired only two-thirds the people that the Patriot Act mandated for protecting our Northern Border. We have invested one-tenth what is needed to protect our ports. We have only just begun to take the steps needed to protect our rail and transit systems. Our first responders have only a fraction of the tools they need. And worse still, the agencies that have been entrusted with the responsibilities are still wallowing in bureaucratic chaos.

As we saw last week the Justice Department and the Homeland Security Department are still in the business of surprising each other. Simply hoping that these problems will somehow workout is not unlike the wishful thinking that many engaged in as they prepared to invade Iraq. Misinformation and bad planning can lead to excruciatingly painful results. The time to reexamine our security, our security budgets and our whole thinking in this area is now. The Congress must act to put a stop to this mindless, non-information based approach to policy and national strategy. It is as likely to prove catastrophic in the defense of our homeland as it has been in installing democracy in Iraq.

Congress may control nothing more than the purse strings — but that is enough. The Congress has all the power it needs to reopen this discussion, insure that assumptions are well founded, the information is the best available, the management is sound and the resources are adequate. What it will take to significantly improve the systems that protect this nation is small in the relative scheme of things — a few tenths of a percent of GDP may be no more than we are now spending on Iraqi reconstruction and one-twentieth of what we have handed out in tax breaks. Given the stakes, we cannot afford to do less.